



# INDEXA

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A non-profit organization for the enhancement of amateur radio,  
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## The Swains Story—NH8S

By Joe Pater, W8GEX

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This trip started when Markus DL9RCF and I began brainstorming about where we could go on a DXpedition in the Pacific. We had been gathering information and corresponding with Peter C21TA on Nauru when two HA's popped up and started operating. So much for that idea.

We then considered Ofu Island of American Samoa (A.S.) as Markus had been there previously and really

liked it. For a variety reasons, we quickly determined that this would not work.

Next I emailed Larry Gandy AH8LG on A.S. about setting up there. We wanted a good take off to Europe and it looked like the north side of A.S. would work. Larry said we would need permission of the village Chief on the north side, but he did not know him.

Then Larry asked if I would have an interest in going to Swains. Swains, which is owned by the Jennings family, is located 200 miles north of A.S., and 10° south of the equator. It had been a coconut plantation since the 1800s, and had been uninhabited for about a year. Larry was a good friend of Alex Jennings, the family representative, and he thought it was a good possibility that we could get their permission to go there. Of course I was interested!



The NH8S team gathers for its obligatory team photograph.

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**inside...** *Fun at the AES Spring Superfest in Milwaukee*

## The Swains Story—NH8S (con'd)

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I emailed Alex and he responded quickly stating he would like to help us put our DXpedition together.

Alex had already granted two other groups permission in recent years, so he had a good idea of what we wanted to do. He recommended that we set the date of the operation for September 2012 because the weather would be nice and the seas would not be so rough. We were in for a surprise on the weather and the seas, but more on this later.

About this time Markus found that he would not be able to get off work for the DXpedition. I was very disappointed that after we finally found a Pacific location he had to drop out. Of course he was disappointed as well. Because our target was now Swains Island, our venture has now turned into a major DXpedition rather than merely the smaller operation that Marcus and I had planned.

I next contacted Craig Thompson K9CT, who was my co-leader of the PJ7E DXpedition. Swains ranked #31 worldwide, and was very high in Europe on the Most Wanted List in *DX Magazine*, so Craig was excited about the idea of organizing this trip with me.

This was the third trip that Craig and I had been on together, and second as co-leaders. While we had both been on many expeditions, this one was special. It ranked high and the location would make it more difficult than our previous trips. It was the first tent/generator operation for us. To put this together, we would need good operators and a good support team. We ended up with outstanding help.

The crew was my job, and a big one. We wanted an international team with some very experienced DXpedition operators, plus a few new guys who had never been on a major trip. Because this was going to be an expensive venture, we needed twenty members to help defray costs. As with all trips, each team member is responsible for their flights, lodging and meals while traveling to and from the starting point. At times I struggled with getting enough participants because, along with the cost, it was an issue for people to be away from home for such a long time.

We had a couple of members sign up, and then drop off due to illness. There were also other trips being planned before or after ours which took some potential crew members. As a matter of fact, Craig

was a member of the 3D2C DXpedition which was just one week after ours. He was gone for six weeks on two DXpeditions—I have yet to ask him if he would do that again. HI.

When Arnie N6HC signed on as an op, he also agreed to serve as our team doctor. It would be hot, there was no landing strip or boat dock on Swains for evacuation, and we would be gone for two weeks, so each member needed to be in good physical condition.

While I was working on the team, Craig was working on a budget, and we were both gathering an equipment list. The list of needs was lengthy.

After we determined the number of ops needed to run 24/7 for two weeks, we calculated the number of stations, equipment requirements, the amount of coax needed, number of generators and amount of power they must supply, amount of fuel needed, tents, tables, food, etc. Craig also took care of the business end by setting up a bank and PayPal account to accept team payments and pay expenses.

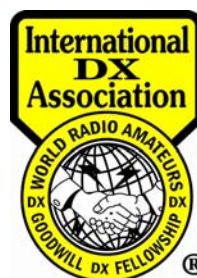
Joe AA4NN (Joe4 as we call him) agreed to be the QSL manager, and his wife Margaret agreed to maintain the financial records. Craig asked my wife Janet, W8CAA, to again work on fundraising like she did for K4M and PJ7E. Even though Markus DL9RCF was unable to make the trip, he offered to assist by relaying donations from Europe.

Although Max I8NHJ was not able to join the crew, he provided interfaces for computers, and Don

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Greenbaum N1DG assisted us in shipping logistics.

Next our attention turned to radios. Ray Novak from Icom was happy to support our trip by furnishing seven IC-7600s, and four PW1 1kw amps. Tom N4XP and Paul W6XA helped with testing the radios, amps, laptops and interfaces before they were shipped.

With a combination of five KPA-500 amps loaned from Elecraft, four PW 1's from Icom, and three AL-80s that we purchased, we had a total of 12 amps for seven stations. We wanted to be sure we had enough amps in case some were damaged during transportation. The amps all worked flawlessly so five were never put in service.

We had a good combination of antennas that provided excellent signals. Jerry WB9Z was the contact person with DX Engineering who supplied the 80m antenna, radial plates, etc. Jerry was also the contact person with Primus, who donated a mile of LMR-400.

Joe4 and Dietmar DL3DXX worked on the four square antennas for 30 and 40 meters. They designed the layout through emails and we were ready for setup as soon as we landed on Swains.

Kimo KH7U loaned us his Titanex V160e vertical. Because of the height, it takes about ten guys to erect. We got it half way up when the wind picked up, so all we could do was just stand there holding the guy ropes. We didn't want to let it down, and we couldn't raise it either due to the high winds, but after a short while we were able to get it up to full height.

The Battle Creek Special which is for 40, 80, and 160, and has been on all major trips, also made it to Swains. The guys in Michigan keep this antenna in great condition for DXpeditions like ours and it works like a charm.

John N7CQQ and Paul W8AEF loaned us their SVDA's which work so well along salt water. All antennas were beamed north over the pole in order to work Europe, and they worked perfectly. We were hoping we would have propagation to Europe and luckily we did; 29 % of our QSO's were from there.

QSLing is an important and tedious job. AA4NN (Joe4) volunteered to respond to the paper QSLs.



**With all the equipment collected, it had to be packed up for transshipment to our destination. This is always a big job.**

We wanted to use technology as much as possible to simplify the whole process. Clublog was chosen for its robust features such as simple uploading, embedding in our website for searching, and most important OQRS for direct and bureau cards. Paper QSLs go to Joe with a SASE and he would issue the paper card. This process has been a great way for the DXpedition to receive funds and defray the many expenses.

We decided that we would send bureau cards using the GlobalQSL website. We would upload a file from Joe for bureau cards and also from the Clublog website. Those hams choosing this process would receive the same QSL card, but later than the direct card. The Clublog output would help because the file already matched our log and Joe would not have to check every QSO. We would also eliminate the need to handle so many cards by hand. LOTW certificate has been received and the major donors received uploads quickly, with all other QSOs acknowledged within 6 months.

Our webmaster choice was easy. Our PJ7E teammate, John K6MM, is an outstanding webmaster and he agreed to handle the job. During the DXpedition, John added a banner that scrolled across the front page giving up-to-date island news as it was happening. This was an excellent way to keep everyone updated on our activities. We received a lot

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of positive comments on the website. The DXpedition rented a BGAN satellite phone to upload logs daily plus give the entire team email access. We were able to relay information to John on a routine basis.

Mark NA6M, was the youngest member at 46.

This was his first DXpedition, although he is a very active contester and DXer from his Texas home.

Early on, Mark offered to be our IT specialist, and do all of the audio and video work. When he wasn't on the radio, he was busy taking video and catching sound bites, running the BGAN satellite phone and keeping the computers happy. He did an excellent job.

Craig, K9CT set up all of the rig interfaces and made sure that the radios worked properly with N1MM. MMTTY was used for RTTY and was run under control of N1MM. He gathered all of the logs on a daily basis and gave them to Mark for uploading. Craig also pretested every radio for proper operation with both microphones and paddles.

We had two pilot stations. Valerie NV9L handled traffic for North America and Col MM0NDX handled the European traffic. Both pilots answered what emails they could and sent the rest to the webmaster. John condensed and forwarded them to the island for Craig and me. Emails took some time as the BGAN phone was set to poll the satellite every four hours for our messages and then poll again in four hours for the return messages. So it took up to eight hours to send and receive messages.

Valerie NV9L suggested we subscribe to a tsunami warning system. Great idea, as needless to say, a tsunami would have been catastrophic to us on a flat island. There were four cell phones set up to be notified in the event of a tsunami, plus the BGAN satellite phone. Luckily this was not an issue.

Larry AH8LG had given us permission to use the Swains Island DX Club call, NH8S. Unfortunately during planning of the trip Larry, the station trustee, passed away. His widow, Uti, was contacted and with the club's authorization appointed Craig to become the trustee of NH8S. Larry's passing was an event that saddened us all.

Craig and I feel that communication is a must on

these majors DXpeditions, so we agreed early on to be very transparent about everything. We sent out team newsletters to keep everyone posted as plans developed and we encouraged input from the team members. We were also in constant contact with the Jennings family. They knew what we were doing, and we knew what they were doing. The major donors also had some early information to keep them up to date on our progress.

To arrive on time, all cargo had to be sent via container ship to American Samoa in July. All of the radio equipment and the team's personal items were first sent to Arnie N6HC who placed it on pallets, shrink wrapped it, and arranged for pickup and transport to the dock. Once the container left California, it was a three week journey before it arrived in American Samoa.



**All of our equipment joined us for a ride to our final destination on our vessel, *M. V. Lady Naomi*.**

Dietmar DL3DXX and I met in Honolulu four days before the rest of the team so that we could go over last minute details before the remainder of the team arrived. When we arrived in A.S., we were met by Alex. His brother, David, and his crew were already on Swains, so we spoke with Dave by phone to discuss the setup he and his crew were building on our behalf. Alex gave Dietmar and me a tour of the island, and then we had some extra time, so Uti, Larry Gandy's widow, invited us to run some Q's from his station. It was fun to be able to put another call

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sign, KH8, in our resumes.

### On to the Island

After three days, the rest of the team arrived on American Samoa and the next day we anxiously boarded the MV Lady Naomi. This was not a luxury ship by any means. It was an old vessel and there were plenty of critters and roaches to go along with an unpleasant odor. It was a 24 hour trip to Swains, and what a trip. We thought the seas would be calm, but we considered them to be pretty rough.

Even though we were all wearing Scopolamine patches, some of the team members had trouble with seasickness.

Our contract called for the food, drinks, tents, generators and fuel to be provided by the Jennings family. Under the leadership of Captain Wally and his sailing mate Tim Thompson, the family had purchased and refurbished an old landing craft. They used this to transport the 30 drums of fuel, refrigerator, two chest freezers, water, tents, and an all terrain vehicle (ATV) and small wagon to the island prior to our arrival.

By the time we arrived, the advance team had everything unloaded using the landing craft. The tents were erected, the "kitchen", toilet, and shower were in place, and the generator/electric system had been set up. This was no small feat and their work saved us an enormous amount of time. They took care of maintenance of the generators, including getting up periodically during the night to refuel them. The crew consisted of ten men who built and maintained the camp and all of the facilities.



**A deluxe base camp setup!**

There were also three cooks that kept us well fed. They took advantage of the availability of fresh fish, plus all of the food we took with us. The food was plentiful and very tasty. If we came in hot and tired, they were always there with their smiling faces. Even in the middle of the night, they had a pot of coffee going, or cold drinks available. No way could we have executed this trip without this hard working team. We so much appreciated their hard work and our hats go off to each and every one of them.



**Here, two of our three cooks make sure no contacts were lost because of operator hunger!**

The ATV was an invaluable asset to our operation. It was 1500 ft. from base camp to the SSB camp, and 3000 ft. from base camp to the CW site. The sand was deep and soft, which made walking difficult, especially in such hot temperatures. They used the ATV to take water to the operating tents several times a day, plus move the fuel and oil to the generators.

When we arrived on Swains we transferred the team and personal items to shore by dinghy. After placing our stuff in the sleeping tents, we began to move equipment to the operating sites. We were anxious to get everything set up and on the air, and worked two full days non-stop. It was very hot with the temperature as high as 125° F during the day. We quickly realized that because of the heat we had to stop working by 11 A.M., and then resume after 5

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P.M. That explains why not all stations were running 24/7 immediately.



**The beaches near each operating position were filled with all kinds of antenna configurations.**

We had our share of injuries. It started on the boat when Juergen DJ2VO became disoriented in the middle of the night, fell, cut his leg, and required multiple stitches. We now think he had a rare reaction to the Scopolamine patch and became disoriented and confused. Because of the extent of his leg injury we asked that he return to Pago Pago for further evaluation and treatment. There he was hospitalized for a few days. Fortunately he recuperated fully and was able to join the team when we returned from Swains. We were all disappointed that he could be so close yet be unable to stay with us, but thankful for his full recovery.

One team member had a very bad swollen leg, another a stomach virus, and others had issues ranging from heat rash, sunburn, blisters, and more.

The sun and heat were just brutal. We believe one member was bitten by something as his lower leg was red, very swollen and uncomfortable. After he returned home, he went directly to the hospital where he was admitted and later diagnosed with MRSA. Everyone is now home and has fully recovered.

We had so many good comments during and after the DXpedition. One was from AB7ZU who said “we were the best in his 52 years of hamming”.

That was nice to hear! Those comments and so

many like that kept us going in that heat.

We were extremely happy to have worked a total of 105,500 on all bands, all modes. For a breakdown, go to our website at [www.nh8s.org](http://www.nh8s.org).

We stopped operating one day early for a couple of reasons. Number one is that the crew was just exhausted. We were sleep deprived because we worked shifts of three hours on and six off, and weren't able to sleep well. The heat was wicked and it took a toll on us. Another reason is that we didn't want to take a chance on a rain storm passing through while we were packing. That gave us an extra day to rest and be sure everything was packed properly for shipment.

The last night, after all of the equipment was dismantled and ready for departure, we were surprisingly entertained by our hosts. For an unforgettable farewell, they played instruments and serenaded us. Such great friendships were bonded.



**Heat in the operating tents, even though open, and the intensive operating schedule had taken its toll near the conclusion of the DXpedition. Here the CW crew pounds out contacts.**

These were extraordinary people who recently endured a lot of tragedy. Before we even started planning this trip, Larry Gandy AH8LG and Uti lost a son in the Iraq war. Then during the planning of the trip, Larry Gandy himself passed away. Next Alex and Rowenda's 26 year old son died suddenly where he was working in California. After that David

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## The Swains Story—NH8S (con'd)

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Jennings's father-in-law passed away in California; his wife and family returned to American Samoa with Dietmar and me. They are a group of close family and friends that supported each other during their times of loss yet were able to continue helping us execute this DXpedition. These are wonderful people.



Hats off to our support crew who prepared and maintained our camp and the three cooks who kept us nourished. They allowed us to dedicate our efforts to give QSOs to the deserving.



Without our support crew, these brief breaks between shifts would not have been possible. The temperatures of 120 degrees F. in the operating and sleeping tents sapped energy, and sleeping during the heat of the day was problematic.

After we arrived back in Pago Pago, the Jennings family had a going away party like we had never seen before. It was held at Rowena and Alex's house with Uti and Sulva helping to cook another great meal. They treated each team member with a coffee mug with our home call sign and a picture of the island imprinted on it, an island t-shirt, and a Certificate of Achievement for making this DXpedition happen.



What gracious hosts! Imagine them giving US a going away party, including remembrances, for the kind attention they had bestowed on us.

While the RF energy of the DXpedition is now gone, much energy is still being expended doing the behind-the-scene things, such as sending paper and bureau cards, OQRS, LoTW, paying of the bills, returning borrowed equipment, and returning personal items to their owners.

In closing, all I can say is that this was an amazing trip with outstanding operators. I had one of the best co-leaders to help me plan and execute a successful trip. Our goals were to make a lot of Qs, have fun, be safe, and return home friends. Because we had such great support on and off the islands, with a total of 45 people, we met our goals.

We received tremendous support from foundations, clubs and individuals. We cannot express our appreciation, as this could not have happened without this help. Thank you!

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## The Swains Story—NH8S

And of course, we offer special thanks for our loved ones who have supported us in this endeavor. The last year was full of emails, phone calls, assignments, etc. And while we were gone, they were the ones at home concerned for our safety while we were trying to have "fun in the sun".

A huge thank you to our great support team: Markus DL9RCF, Max I8NHJ, John K6MM, Col MM0NDX, Don N1DG, Tom N4XP, John N7CQQ, Valerie NV9L, Paul W6XA, Paul W8AEF, Janet W8CAA and Margaret XYL of AA4NN.

Everyone got along so well and worked so hard. We have wonderful memories and made lasting friendships. My hat goes off to an amazing team:

**Barry Fletcher 9V1FJ, Joe Blackwell AA4NN, Juergen Borsdorf DJ2VO, Dietmar Kasper DL3DXX, Alan Brown K5AB, Carl Schroeder K9CS, Craig Thompson K9CT, Mike Tessmer K9NW, Lou Dietrich N2TU, Arnie Shatz N6HC, David Greenhut N6HD, Mark Stennett NA6M, Tom Berson ND2T, Hawk Eriksson SM5AQD, Charlie Spetnagel W6KK, Joe Pater W8GEX, Hal Turley W8HC, Clark Stewart W8TN, and Jerry Rosalius WB9Z.**

—73 *Joe Pater, W8GEX*

## DXers Meet at AES's Spring 2013 Superfest



**INDEXA Director Jerry Rosalius (WB9Z) and ARRL First VP Rick Roderick (K5UR) round up the DXers at Amateur Electronics Supply's Superfest. In the second row are: Mike Lawrence (N9UA), Mark Michel (W9OP), Tom Harke (AA9A), and Rudy Verhoeven (NF9V).**

Indexa Director Jerry Rosalius was on the road to Milwaukee this spring for the AES Superfest. The event draws its share of DXers as shown in the above photo. You'll recognize Jerry as one of the team members of the Malpelo DXpedition (HK0NA) reported in this newsletter in the Fall 2012 edition (Issue 99). Rick Roderick can claim a few kudos for his DX skills, too. Check out Rick's bio sketch on QRZ.COM.

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